

Hobbies

Square holes in your change and other tales from abroad

By Roger Boye

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Today's column answers questions about money from abroad.

Q—Do coins with square holes in the center and Chinese letters have much significance or value?

W.E., Mount Prospect

A—For hundreds of years, China produced huge quantities of cast coins dubbed "cash." They were last issued earlier this century, but many of the varieties still have just nominal value as collectibles. The holes permitted people to string their money for easy counting.

Q—We found a copper coin dated 1320 in my father's strong box. The design includes an assortment of wavy lines and a "10." Have we hit the jackpot with such an ancient item?

R.T., Chicago

A—No. You have a 91-year-old 10 mazunas piece from Morocco, which retails for about \$1.50 in "fine condition." Morocco and many other Islamic countries count years from A.D. 622, when the prophet Mohammed fled from Mecca to Medina. A Mohammedan calendar also uses a lunar year of 354 days, meaning that 1320 equates to A.D. 1902.

For the past four decades, most Moroccan coins have carried two dates, Islamic and Christian.

Q—What does the inscription "Estados Unidos Mexicanos" mean on coins?

B.N., Oak Park

A—United Mexican States, which has appeared on most Mexican coins since the early 1900s.

Q—Are rupees still used?

H.B., Chicago

A—Yes, especially in India.